



Rural Portraits

Feature Family: Dan and Karen Casler

Hometown: Little Falls, N.Y.

Population: 6,000-7,000

County: Herkimer

Location: 60 miles west of Albany, 65 miles east of Syracuse in the Mohawk Valley

Children: Jesse(6) Jeremiah (5) Samuel (1)

Occupations: Dan - dairy farming, produces and sells baled hay and corn, and raises heifers; co-owns with mother, Shirley. Karen - full-time homemaker, owns and operates greenhouse and extensive garden. Sells produce and flowers at farmers' markets.

The ninth generation to own and manage the dairy farm he and his family call home, Dan Casler, Little Falls, N.Y., works hard to help assure a positive future for his family and for rural America.

A member of the Institute for Rural America's board of directors, Casler brings to the table the perspective of a young ambitious dairyman. He, like most farm producers, recognizes agriculture as the economic mainstay, not only of his local area in Herkimer County, but of the state as well.

In the area where the Caslers live, farms are smaller than in other areas of New York, but it's still easy to see their importance. In Herkimer County most farms focus on dairying, with 19,000 head of dairy cattle dotting the landscape. USDA's 1996 agricultural statistics show county farm income at \$54,374,000, \$45,000,000 of which came from dairies.

"I like everything about where we live. Location. The fact that it's been in the family for this long," Casler said.

The Caslers milk about 50 Holsteins on the 650-acre farm, and raise about 70-75 head of youngstock, as well as a small number of hogs and chickens. About 450 acres of their farm is tillable, and that is used to grow corn,

hay and oats.

Casler readily sees certain advantages producers near him have.

"What makes our area stay strong, is that there are a lot of family farms that have stayed in the family over the years. The land is good and the weather has been good over the past 30 years. Everyone seems to persevere."

Despite the large financial contribution to the economy, farmers themselves are facing great challenges. Casler has seen some success in beginning farmer programs in New York, but established producers continue to leave the industry. His concern lies in farm income.

And Casler hopes the Institute can help with that. If producers learn about new marketing techniques that essentially increase income, they can thrive in agriculture for years to come.

Dan and Karen have high hopes for their children. "I'd like one of them to at least take over the farm... agriculture is a great way to make a difference in the world."

The Caslers recognize that a community with a variety of industries provides more opportunities. And Dan understands that helping producers could help Little Falls companies such as the local paper mill, the tea packager and steel welding plant.

The community is filled with creative thinkers, too. Little Falls received its name from a waterfall on the river which was part of the Erie Canal. Today, locals are venturing to capitalize on reviving the Erie Canal. They plan to promote tourism as another industry.

Combining the positive impacts of an improved farm economy, strong industry, and a new, unique tourism influence offers promise of renewed growth for Little Falls and other communities like it across the country that strive for betterment as well.

